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ABSTRACT

This explorative essay considers some new developments in open-system theories of organizational interaction with relevant environments that might be useful for educational historians. The authors explore ways in which changes in the social meaning of the American high school may have led to structural and functional changes. Three dimensions of the organization of schools are utilized for analysis: the extent to which school structures are differentiated, the nature of the indicators used to signify school performance, and the changes that take place in the structure and operation of schools. An additional three dimensions are used to define social meanings, or shared conceptions, about school organizations: prestige, distinctiveness, and exclusivity. The three dimensions of the social meanings of school organizations are theorized to be related to the three dimensions of school organizations. This approach is illustrated in an examination of the changing social conceptions of the American high school. Major shifts in the social meaning of the American high school are argued to have occurred in the change of the high school from an elite to a mass institution between 1900 and 1920, and in the 1954 Brown decision by the Supreme Court. (Author/MLF)

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# Institutions of Meaning: Changing Conceptions of Educational Organizations in American Society

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Institutions of Meaning: Changing Conceptions of Educational Organizations in American Society

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## Introduction

Historians of American education have found it fruitful to employ some of the theoretical notions developed by sociologists and other social scientists. In particular, the theoretical work on organizations has proven useful in reinforcing historical inquiry into the evolution of the American school. For example, studies of the growth of school bureaucracies (Katz, 1971; Tyack, 1974) and of the influence of scientific management on schooling (Callahan, 1962) have made good use of the theories developed in connection with work on rational management models in organizational sociology. (For a summary of the work on rational management models, see Scott, 1981, ch. 3.)

These studies have documented the efforts of social reformers and school leaders to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of schools according to their own set of goals within an environment typified by scarce political and financial resources. Additionally, they have explored the effects of the structure of educational institutions on their function, within an historical context.

Tyack's systhesis, The One Best System, demonstrates the variety of educational organizations and educational practices dotting the American landscape during the 1850's. He chronicles the process whereby cultural and political change originating outside the school, including the multi-faceted progressive movement, the ethno-centrism whipped to a fury by the first world war, and the rise of scientific management, led to the standardization and bureaucratization of urban school systems. One

reform, above all, symbolizes the interaction between environmental conditions, the rationalizing impulse of school managers, and the structure of schooling, namely, the consolidation of school governance in centrally elected city school boards and their appointed representatives, city and district superintendents.

The so-called administrative progressives, acting through good government reform organizations in city after city eliminated ward-based school boards in favor of centrally elected city school boards. Ostensibly, "removing schools from politics", these reformers and the schoolmen with whom they allied sought to put control of school policy and school governance in the hands of the right sort of politicians, those who expoused the emergent Anglo-protestant ideology. By centralizing elections, the progressives severely diminished the possibility that representatives of specific ethnic or class groups could muster the financing or the support necessary to win a city-wide contest. German, Italian and other immigrant groups in this way lost the ability to define and control the educational apparatus even in wards in which they formed a plurality.

In Katz's words, these "bureaucratic innovations were introduced as part of a continuing process of rationalizing and coordinating the increasingly complex urban school systems." (Katz, 1971, p. 70) As Katz and Tyack both show, the centralization of control in cities across the nation produced similar results. Educational organizations were standardized and "Americanized." City boards initiated policies which forbade instruction in any language other than English. Similarly, sectarian schools, tacitly approved as part of an informal polyglot school "system" were forced to either abandon their focus or go it alone

as private academies. (Tyack, 1974)

As historians of education have examined conflicting views of education among school patrons and competing educational organizations, they have focused upon educational reformers and institutional actors as sources of "rationalizing" impulses. In this paper, we explore some new developments in organizational theory which might be useful for historians of American education. We focus particularly on developments in open-system theories of organizational interaction with relevant environments. We present neither a general overview and assessment of these recent developments in organizational theory, nor original research on the relationship between American schools and their environment. Rather, we develop one theme from among several open system approaches and use it to re-examine some rather well trodden ground in educational historiography, the development of the American high school. We suggest that historical studies of the high school and American schooling in general will benefit from an explicit environmental focus and that in addition to key reformers and institutional actors, the environment in which schooling takes place is an important source of organizational change. Since our formulation is exploratory, we are involved in fitting a new suit of theoretical clothing to the body of historical research on American schools; we are not yet trying to sell that suit.

## Developments in Organizational Theory

The absence of the use of organizational theory in the historical research on the relationship between schools and their environments says a great deal more about the development of organizational theory than it does about the development of the historiography of American education.

While historians were always careful to consider the community and general environmental forces impinging upon schools, organizational theorists were at times content to treat organizations in isolation from those very forces. In his review of the development of organizational theory in American sociology, Scott (1978; 1981) notes that prior to about 1960 most organizational theorists employed what have been referred to as "closed-system" models. In such models or theories, organizations were treated as if they were systems closed to external or environmental forces. Such models focused primarily on the internal characteristics of organizations. Scott distinguishes two types of closed-system models, rational models or models where "the structure of the organization is conceived as an arrangement designed to foster the effective pursuit of specified objectives;" and social models or models that emphasize that "structual arrangements primarily represent settlements of conflicting status and power concerns of groups of participants and constituents" (Scott, 1978, p. 22). In the historiography of American education, Katz's (1971) examination of the growth of school bureaucracies represents an example of the use of the former; while Tyack's (1974) study of urban schooling and Lazerson's (1971) study of the Boston schools make use of the latter type of model. Whether the models were rational or social, however, prior to about 1960, they tended to focus on internal aspects of organizations.

Continuing to chronicle the development of organizational theory, Scott notes that from about 1960 on, theoretical models of organizations have emphasized the importance to the organization of external events and processes including economic, political, cultural, social, and inter-organizational elements. These elements are now increasingly relied upon

in constructing explanations of organizational structures and behavior. As with the earlier closed-system models, Scott distinguishes both rational and social types of open-system models. The former emphasize the rational pursuit of predetermined objectives, while the latter look at organizational structures and operations as the result of larger political and social forces.

It is this latest generation of organizational theories and models that we would like to examine for their possible usefulness in the historiography of American education. Scott refers to these as open-system social models and dates their appearance in the organizational literature from about 1970. While this latest genre of organizational theories is varied and diverse, a major theme in many of these approaches is the emphasis on the social meanings of organizations and the effects of these social meanings held by those in the environment on the structural arrangements of organizations and their capacity to operate in their environments.

There is reason to expect that the environments of educational institutions play a large part in explaining the development of American education. As much work in the history of education has detailed, school systems have developed into public bureaucracies. In his recent study of change in government finance agencies, M. Meyer (1979) notes that, contrary to prevailing opinion, public bureaucracies may be more, not less, susceptible to shifts in their environments than private sector organizations; they may be more responsive to environmental demands.[1] Thus despite a long history of attempts to professionalize education and insulate it from lay control, public schools may have evolved into a form that is peculiarly susceptible to environmental

influences.

Moreover, there is reason to believe that, beyond the rational structures of schools and the techniques of educational practice, the social conceptions held of particular types of educational institutions (e.g. common school, high school) have an effect on schools and their development. In our haste to reveal the concrete dimensions of the rational and technical aspects of school organizations, we should not overlook W.I. Thomas (1928) famous dictum that "If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences." Thus, for example, it may be as useful for explaining developments in the history of teaching to know when teaching came to be considered women's work as it is to know when the number of female teachers surpassed that of male teachers. More generally, anomalies in the historical statistical record may be better understood in the context of the social meanings of schools and schooling.

## Schools as Institutionalized Organizations

The organizational theorists most responsible for developing theoretical approaches to the study of organizations that include consideration of the social meanings of those organizations comprise what Perrow (1979) refers to as the revitalized institutional school. The members of this group who have devoted the most attention to schools as organizations are Meyer and Rowan. In their paper on institutionalized organizations (Meyer and Rowan, 1977, p. 342) they note that in conventional theories of organizations the rational formal structure of an organization is "assumed to be the most effective way to coordinate and control the complex relational networks involved in modern technical or work activities."

When applied to schools, this would suggest that the organizational arrangements of schools evolve as rational solutions to problems of the coordination and control of instruction, as Katz suggests. However, there is a good deal of anecdotal and research evidence to suggest that the organizational arrangements which characterize school governance are not well suited to coordinating or controlling instruction (Cohen, 1977). One has to look no further than the mass of literature on the supervision of teaching to realize that rationality and control are missing from most administrative arrangements (Lortie, 1969; 1975; Dreeben, 1970). March and Olson (1976) and Weick (1976) have characterized educational organizationas as "loosely coupled" precisely because the administrative structure, though wedded to the concept of rationality, is disconnected from the actual production of schooling, the teaching taking place in the classroom.

Meyer and Rowan argue (1977; 1978) that the structure of both parts of the loosely coupled educational organization, the core functions of teaching and the administrative superstructure, are useful to the educational enterprise. Such arrangements serve both to legitimate and to protect the organization in a post-industrial society with a potentially rapid rate of change.

Meyer and Rowan (1977, p. 341) note that "the formal structures of many organizations in post-industrial society dramatically reflect the myths of their institutional environments instead of the demands of their work activities." Hence, schools adopt norms of rational and formal administrative structures, what Meyer and Rowan call "ritual ceremonial" structures, in an effort to tap into the external legitimacy fostered by the myth of rational management widely subscribed to in their environment. Moreover, school administrators are not themselves immune to this myth,

and they create structures which reflect their own proclivities and assumptions. This perspective would suggest, for example, that it would be just as useful to view the efforts of school leaders to introduce a new curriculum as an attempt, either consciously or unconsciously, to gain legitimacy in their organizational environment as it would be to see it as an effort to improve the efficiency of the educational operation.

However, it is important not to construe our interpretation of the efforts of school leaders to gain legitimacy in their organizational enviroments with an abandonment in practice of the management of the relational network to achieve desired results. In fact, the attempt to secure legitimacy in the environment may be intimately related to the management of internal affairs. In the first place, Meyer and Rowan point out that the institutionalized organizations must be maintained in a state that does not belie the institutional myths surrounding them. In the second place, given the nature of schools as client serving organizations (Rosengren and Lefton, 1970), the ability of school leaders and school organizations to secure legitimacy in the environment may be crucial to gaining client cooperation in the pursuit of desired ends.

An example of the importance of securing legitimacy in the organizational environment takes us back to our earlier discussion of supervision. The supervision literature suggests that most school administrators don't have adequate time to really supervise and evaluate instruction, presumably the central task of the school (Natriello and Dornbusch, 1981). The literature on the principalship[2] conceives of the role in terms of several separate domains - the principal as supervisor of teachers, the principal as community liaison, the principal as building manager, etc. The principal who pays great attention to cultivating support

in the community is seen as neglecting his role as a supervisor of teachers. However, when one analyzes the nature of the positive and negative sanctions that a principal can utilize in his role as supervisor and evaluator of instruction, it seems clear that the ability of the principal to rally the support of the community, particularly parents, behind teachers and their work with students, is a key source of power and authority. The principal with high stature in the community may thus be a more effective socializer and supervisor of teachers. The social meaning of the principal in the environment may enhance his or her ability to perform the technical functions associated with the internal relational network of the school. This same process may operate at the school level. A school with high stature in the community may produce more powerful socialization experiences for students. Thus the social meaning of the institution of the school is something that school leaders must attend to if they want to get the job done.[3]

When viewed with this in mind, our attempt to develop an explanation of the history of the development of school structure does not require us to fault school administrators if they seem to neglect the internal management of schools and the quest for more effective educational experiences; it merely recognizes what many effective school leaders have known all along, that management of the external environment is also crucial for producing effective educational experiences internally. Both the structure and functioning of schools are affected by the environment, and it is the astute school leader who can operate in that environment to produce desired effects.

In addition to its utility in allowing school leaders to operate to secure legitimacy in the environment, the loosely coupled structure of school organizations also serves to protect the organization from

disturbances in the environment. The de-coupling of administration from the technical core screens and buffers the educational production process from potentially disruptive environmental influences (Thompson, 1967). This buffering process is intimately related to the shared conceptions of reality held by those involved in the school. Despite elaborate administrative arrangements, Meyer and Rowan (1978, p. 101) argue that the de-coupled school organization relies upon shared good faith, "the logic of confidence", for much of its legitimacy: "Parties bring to each other the taken-for-granted, good faith assumption that the other is, in fact, carrying out his or her defined activity."

This shared good faith serves instead of rationalized control processes to structure the school organization. We suggest that the logic of confidence noted by Meyer and Rowan is anchored in conceptions of reality shared by those involved with the schools, educators, students, parents, and the community at large. These shared conceptions of reality find particular expression in what we have identified as the social meaning of schooling and of particular types of school organizations. Further, as the social meaning of schooling changes, we will argue, the environmental support and sources of legitimacy for educative enterprise change as well, affecting the structure of educational organizations, and ultimately, their ability to retain social sanctions. In this explorative essay, we hope to build upon the work of Meyer and Rowan by demonstrating the historical value of their concepts and by exploring ways in which changes in the social meaning of the American high school may have led to structural and functional changes within this educational organization.

## Areas of Inquiry: Dimensions of Schools and Social Meaning

In working with notions as potentially amorphous as the social meanings

of schools and the organization of schools, it is necessary to attempt to distinguish what might be some more specific relevant dimensions of each. The organization of schools, of course, provides a more concrete starting place for analysis. In terms of the organization of schools, we suggest that attention be paid to three dimensions: the extent to which school structures are differentiated, the nature of the indicators used to signify school performance, and the changes that take place in the structure and operation of schools.

Differentiation within and among school organizations provides the investigator with a readily ascertainable feature of school organization. Not only is the concept of differentiation one that has been subjected to extensive discussion in the organizational literature, but it is also a persistent theme throughout the development of American schools. Blau's (1972) work in developing a theory of the impact of increasing size on organizational differentiation is an example of the use of this concept in the organizational literature, while the long and heated debates over the differentiation of the secondary school curriculum provide an example from the history of education. Differentiation thus refers to the development of different units within and among school organizations. Such units may be curricular, instructional, or administrative. The history of education in the United States is replete with examples of differentiation of all sorts.

While differentiation is a dimension of organizational structure that is readily visible in the historical record, when we search for a dimension to tap the operation of educational organizations, our task is more difficult. Here we are principally interested in the ability of schools to achieve desired ends. Obviously, it is difficult enough to determine

the effectiveness of schools in the present without having to attempt such a determination in the historical record. The passage of time deprives us of both the consistency of records and, perhaps more importantly, of the consistency of purpose upon which record keeping systems are based.

In organizations such as schools where the outputs are less clear than in production organizations, measures of output, whether they be scores of elementary students on minimal competency tests or the proportion of a high school class admitted to college, may be largely ceremonial. School leaders and members of the larger community may thus compete for power to determine which of these measures are to be used to assess the functioning of the school. To the extent that these measures are agreed upon, they represent the outcomes of political processes to define the nature of the school as a social institution.

Thus the political battles surrounding the choice and use of such indicators may present a more complex and more revealing portrait of the functioning of the school than the indicators themselves. Studies of the history of the operations of school organizations should examine both the indicators and the forces that raise certain indicators to positions of prominence from the potentially limitless field of possible indicators.

Finally, a third dimension that might be followed in the historical record involves the changes that take place in the structure and operation of schools. Both the nature of change and the rate of change could be chronicled. Obviously, the history of education is already a history of the changes that have occurred in school organizations, so that advocating the study of change is neither new nor specific. What we would suggest, however, is that changes in schools and schooling be examined in light of

their sources in the environment separately from their sources in the development of some new educational technology. For example, changes in pedagogical technique such as the recently heralded concept of "direct instruction" might be interpreted not only as the result of some new "scientific" technical discovery based on the empirical work of educational researchers, but also as the result of increasing political pressure in the environment of school organizations for greater progress in terms of student gains on standardized achievement tests. Thus historical changes in the structure and functioning of school organizations should be examined for their internal technical as well as for their external political sources. Spring's (1972) discussion of the rise of vocational guidance and the junior high school provides a fine model of this type of analysis.

To guide examinations of the social meanings of schools we have identified three dimensions of such social meanings or shared conceptions about school organizations. We have labeled these dimensions prestige, distinctiveness, and exclusivity. Each of the dimensions describes an organization in relation to its environment.

Prestige refers to the perception that the school organization has effects beyond its immediate boundaries. So, for example, within its boundaries a school may transmit skills to students. However, there may be the shared conception that beyond its immediate boundaries, the school prepares individual students for careers as leaders of communities or that the school is instrumental in enhancing the economic growth of the community. Schools thought to produce leaders and enhance the economic growth of the community would be high in prestige. In such institutions there seems to be present what Heider (1958) refers to as a "spread phenomenon", ability in one area such as teaching skills is seen to spread

to other areas such as enhancing the economic growth of the community.

In the case of schools, organizations which are by design places where individuals are prepared to leave and accomplish other things, this spread phenomenon may be centered around the lives and prospects of individual students.[4] However, certain schools may also be viewed as having direct spread effects on the community. The conception of the school as a social center of the community or a major community organization in small towns would be an example of prestige that is not mediated by the lives and careers of students.

Distinction, a second dimension of the social meaning of organizations, refers to the perception that the school has something unique to offer or that a unit within a school has something unique to offer within the context of the school. Schools in general are distinctive to the extent that they are conceived of as providing a service that no other organization provides. Types of schools are distinctive to the extent that they are conceived of as organizations providing a service that no other type of school provides. Units within schools are distinctive to the extent that they are conceived of as providing a service that no other unit within the school provides. Thus high schools are distinctive in relation to colleges and common schools, vocational schools are distinctive in relation to other high schools, and specialized curricula are distinctive in relation to other curricula.

Exclusivity, our third dimension of the social meaning of the school, refers to the perception that only a limited part of the environment may partake of the services provided by the school. Thus school organizations are exclusive to the extent that they attempt to serve only a narrow range of students. Accordingly, the common school would be less exclusive

than the private elementary school, and the comprehensive high school would be less exclusive than the vocational high school.

The dimensions of prestige, distinction, and exclusivity provide a more focused way to examine the social meaning of school organizations. Organizations with great prestige, distinctiveness, and exclusivity would possess strong social meanings, while those with less prestige distinctiveness, and exclusivity would possess weaker social meanings, that is, social meanings that are not as pervasive and salient among those in the environment.

Moreover, we suspect that these three dimensions of the social meanings of school organizations may be related to the three dimensions of school organizations that we have identified. While we are not in a position to state these expected relationships in the form of formal hypotheses, we offer them as guiding themes that might be explored in the historical record.

The prestige of a school organization should be related to the indicators employed to assess the performance of the organization. School organizations high in prestige should be characterized by fewer such indicators than school organizations low in prestige. School organizations with very great prestige may be subjected to no immediate indicators at all as those inside and outside the organization rest confident in the widespread effects of the organization.

The distinctiveness of a school organization should be related to the process of differentiation of its structure. Organizations that are high in terms of distinctiveness should be less likely to experience further differentiation of structure than organizations that are low in terms of distinctiveness. This same relationship should apply to types of

schools and units within schools.

Finally, school organizations that are more exclusive should be less likely to be subjected to change than school organizations that are less exclusive. Schools serving a larger segment of those in the environment are more likely to be exposed to any of the changes in that total environment than are schools serving a more restrictive portion of the environment.

At this point we are not suggesting that these dimensions of the social meaning of the school determine the degree of differentiation, the selection and interpretation of indicators for assessment, or the extent and rate of change in school organizations. The situation is much more complex than this. Even a brief excursion into the historical record suggests that not only the levels of these dimensions but the sources of such things as prestige, distinctiveness, and exclusivity may vary. Further, at this point we are unable to make statements regarding the relationships between these three dimensions of the social meaning. We are merely offering them as concepts worthy of trial application in developing a greater understanding of the history of American schools.

## The Social Meanings of the American High School

The high school is an appropriate institution to which to apply our notions about the dimensions of the social meaning of educational organizations because its social meaning has changed rather dramatically during its century long history. First established as an alternative to work for the sons and daughters of middle and upper class families, the high school of the nineteenth century catered to only a fraction of the school aged youth. As late as 1870, only 16,000 students graduated from public and private high schools, only two percent of all seventeen year-olds

in America. Katz and Tyack both note that for the children of the well-to-do, high school in the early years served as a channel into colleges or into white collar jobs. Only in the twentieth century did the high school become a mass institution, a change we will explore shortly.

We will argue that since 1900 there have been two major shifts in the social meaning of the American high school. The first, which changed the high school from an elite to a mass institution, occurred between 1900 and 1920. During this period, problems of immigrant socialization brought forth what Frank Spaulding called "a radical change in attitude...to insure any large increase in the number of boys and girls who shall get instruction much beyond the sixth grade." (Spaulding, 1922) Labor unrest, the nationalistic fervor encouraged by the government during the war and increasing youth crime in urban areas caused Spaulding and other reformers to re-think the role of the high school in American life.

The second change swept the nation subsequent to the 1954 Brown decision by the Supreme Court. The old social meaning of the high school was severely challenged by attempts by citizens and government agencies to integrate high schools across the country. In community after community the high school became the prime battleground in the fight for integration. These controversies have left the high school bereft of its old social meaning and still searching to identify and act upon a new cohesive meaning which would enable it to garner public support. The chart on the following page captures some of the dominant features of these changes in the social meaning of the American high school and graphically presents the analytic categories developed in our earlier discussion of the social meaning of organizations.

## The Social Meanings of the American High School - 1890 to 1980

| | 1880 | 1890 | 1900 | 1910 | 1920 | 1930 | 1940 | 1950 | 1960 | 1970 | 1980 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **PRESTIGE** | **Mental Discipline** | | | | **Social Efficiency** | | | | **Social Equality** | | |
| | -immediate training in certain disciplines (e.g. Latin) would have spillover effects in all areas | | | | -high schools would prepare students to assume their most appropriate position in the well managed society | | | | -schools might actually reshape the available positions in the society | | |
| **DISTINCTION** | -high schools struggle to become distinct in relation to the college<br>-accreditation requirements make high schools more uniform and thus distinctive from non high schools<br>-development of more uniform college admissions procedures permits the development of more uniform high school curriculum | | | | -high schools suffer from vague aims between 1900 and 1920 and are subjected to forces such as vocationalism that encourage differentiation<br>-increasing differentiation within schools as educators become more willing to distinguish between fitting and finishing students during the early part of this period<br>-forces for differentiation are contained within the comprehensive high school which itself emerges as a distinctive institution | | | | -high schools have difficulty in capturing a distinctive role in the quest for social equality<br>-competing organizations include the junior college and college and government training and jobs programs | | |
| **EXCLUSIVITY** | -institutions for the well-to-do<br>-small percentage of youths attend and an even smaller percentage graduates | | | | -educators call for universal secondary education until the age of 18<br>-large numbers of students enroll in high schools across the nation | | | | -exclusivity based on residential patterns gives way to integration across residential neighborhoods | | |
| graduates in thousands | | | 95 | 156 | 311 | 667 | 1221 | 1200 | 1864 | 2906 | |
| percentage of 17 year olds | | | 6.3 | 8.6 | 16.3 | 28.8 | 49.0 | 57.4 | 63.4 | 75.6 | |

The nature of the prestige of the high school during the last part of the nineteenth century and the first part of the twentieth century may be summarized by the term "mental discipline." As reflected in the report of the Committee of Ten, mental discipline referred to the use of the subjects in the curriculum of the high school to develop in students the powers of observation, expression, and reasoning (Krug, 1969). Thus the prestige of the high school was reflected in the direct training of students in certain subjects in the belief that such training would lead to spillover effects on all areas of life. Of course, the burden of accomplishing this task or mission rested with the individual students who would put their powers to good use in a variety of areas.

During this early period the distinction of the high school was relatively low. It was not uncommon during this time to have difficulty distinguishing between high schools and colleges. Krug notes that as late as 1902 a professor at the University of Missouri compared public high schools to an infant industry in need of protection from colleges offering secondary school work (Krug, 1969). Some of this confusion stemmed from the similarities between the two institutions, but much of it resulted from the substantial differences among institutions going by the name of "high school." Efforts were made to distinguish the high school from the college (Krug, 1969, p. 101)[5] as well as to see to it that high schools became more uniform in nature. Indeed, this was one outcome of the report of the Committee of Ten.[6] Still throughout this period the high school continued to seek a distinctive role in American society.

During this early period, although high school enrollment increased rapidly from 202,963 students in 2,526 public high schools in 1890 (Krug, 1969, p. 169) to 519,251 students in 6,005 such schools in 1900,

the percentage of the high school age population to actually graduate from high school was only 6.3% in 1900 and only 16.3% in 1920. However, by 1920 over two million students, representing fully one third of the high school age population, were enrolled in high school for at least some time.

Thus during this period the prestige of the high school rested in the concept of mental discipline, the distinctiveness of the high school was relatively low, and the exclusivity of the high school began to give way. Toward the end of this period as the exclusivity of the high school fell and as the prestige of the institution anchored in the notion of mental discipline was diminished, the high school underwent important changes, including differentiation of its structure and a shift in the indicators of its performance.

Increasing numbers of educators were willing to separate the finishing of pupils and the fitting of pupils for college (Krug, 1969, p. 236). This willingness was expressed in two forms in the structure of the high school. One form, of course, involved the creation of differentiated organizations in the form of various types of vocational schools; while the other involved the clearer differentiation of courses of study within the high school. This movement toward differentiation among and within high schools is often seen as a response to demands of industry for vocational training. It is a trend that could never have arisen, however, but for the weakening of the notion of mental discipline as the source of prestige for the high school. Mental discipline would suggest that a single course of study in a single type of school would promise a sharpening of powers that would be useful in any sort of vocational endeavour, particularly where the job requirements were subject to change in a fast growing economy. But the doctrine of mental discipline was

on the wane, and the decline of the prestige of the high school anchored in mental discipline together with the loss of exclusivity due to rapidly rising enrollments may in part explain the attempt to achieve distinctiveness through increasing activity to produce a differentiated structure for the high school.

During this period of the weakening of the social meaning of the high school a shift in the indicators of performance of the institution took place. During the period when mental discipline offered a high level of prestige for the high school, high schools were judged informally by the contributions of their students to society. More specifically, this took the form of college admissions as an indicator of high school performance. With the decline of the doctrine of mental discipline and the differentiation of students within high schools into a group being fitted for college and a group being finished for adult life, the use of college admissions as an indciator was no longer appropriate. The indicators used to assess the performance of the institution became more specific and more closely connected to the school itself. Individual subjects in the curriculum were now held up to scrutiny to determine if they should survive on the basis of the results they delivered (Krug, 1969, p. 315). This interim shift to more specific and more proximal indicators was consistent with the newly emerging doctrine of social efficiency.

The changes in the high school, including the increasing differentiation of structure and the shift to more specific indicators of performance, might have gone further had it not been for the rise of a new doctrine to anchor the prestige of the high school by suggesting that it once again could have effects beyond those directly observable. The newly emergent conception of the high school reflected the nature of the times, a period

of intense interest in progress and greater efficiency through scientifically determined courses of action in industry and society in general. The prestige of the school became rooted in the movement for social efficiency. The high school would be the vehicle to equip each young member of society to function in a society "whose touchstone would be orderly and efficient management" (Krug, 1972, p. 3). With the doctrine of social efficiency, the prestige of the high school rose once again. For the high school would no longer provide students with study of "academic" subjects designed to give them powers of reasoning, expression, and analysis. Instead it would fit them for their appropriate places in the well managed society. With many in American society anticipating the full realization of the new scientifically designed and managed state, the high school would play a central role in this important quest.

The distinction of the high school also rose, for it was unique in its capacity to bring together on one stage all of the future actors of the American drama and fit them for their appropriate roles.[7] The goal of bringing all youth into the high school, what in our terms might be the loss of exclusivity, was turned into a distinguishing feature of the institution. Only through the schools would all Americans be touched so intimately by a single institution.

It may have been the rise of the prestige of the high school through its role in promoting social efficiency that counteracted the most severe pressures for continued differentiation of the organization. The vehicle for the promotion of social efficiency was not to be a group of variously defined specialized high schools -- neither the narrow academic school of the past nor the specialized vocational school for the industrial arts pushed so vigorously prior to the rise of

the doctrine of social efficiency. The vehicle for promoting social efficiency was to be the comprehensive high school housing all students and providing all services. Thus the differentiation and the changes necessitated by the tremendous growth of the school population were internalized within the comprehensive high school.

With a new social meaning taking form, educators embarked on a quest to enroll all students of the appropriate age group in a single type of institution that would be thought to have profound effects on the society at large. Efforts such as raising the age of compulsion, and increasing non-academic curricular offerings, coupled with declining employment opportunities for youth in the 1930's all contributed to the penetration of schooling into more and more segments of society previously "unschooled" or schooled to a slight degree.

Nationwide, for every one thousand pupils entering fifth grade in 1925, 344 entered twelfth grade and 302 graduated from high school. In 1950, school retention rates had risen to 632 in twelfth grade and 584 high school graduates per one thousand children in fifth grade. Other measures corroborate the dramatic increase in school participation among successive generations of Americans. In 1900, ninety-five thousand youth graduated from high schools, six percent of all seventeen year olds in the nation. In 1920 sixteen percent of all seventeen year olds graduated. In 1940 and 1960, graduation figures rose in an equally dramatic manner with forty-nine and sixty-five percent of the relevant population graduating from high school in those years. (U.S. Department of Commerce, 1976)

As the social meaning of the high school gained strength during the

course of this period, the indicators of high school performance seemed to become less specific and proximal. With educators across the nation focusing on the goal of enrolling and graduating larger and larger numbers of students, the emphasis in assessing the performance of schools seemed to shift to a focus on the process of building schools and enrolling larger and larger numbers of students.[8]

The period of the dominance of social efficiency in the social meaning of the high school lasted until the 1950's when educators came close to realizing the goal of universal high school education and when the dream of a society organized for social efficiency began to fade. The high school no longer occupied a special place in the environment. The expansion of colleges and universities following the second world war cut deeply into the mandate of the high school. The high school diploma was diminished as the key to entre into one's special place in the well managed society.

As the U.S. moved through the fifties and into the sixties the fading image of the high school as an instrument for social efficiency might have found its most likely replacement in the image of the high school as an instrument for social equality. The high school as a vehicle for social equality would be the place where young American's from all races, creeds, and abilities would come together to be equalized or at least to receive equal opportunity.

The new doctrine of social equality potentially carried a sort of prestige which promised more than the earlier doctrines of mental discipline and social efficiency. Mental discipline suggested that training in certain subjects would confer generalized power on high school graduates which they could then apply to their chosen tasks. Social efficiency suggested that high school students could be trained

for their anticipated future roles in the well managed society, and thus high school could substantially facilitate the realization of that society. But the doctrine of social equality suggested more. Not only would students have their powers sharpened or be fit for the most appropriate role in the well managed society; the doctrine of social equality suggestad that the high school could act to actually reshape the kinds of positions available in the society. The role of education in the War on Poverty seemed to promise the elimination of positions in society below the poverty level if only everyone received enough education.

We have been tentative in discussing social equality as the central concept in a new social meaning of the high school because it has not clearly been the source of a new social definition of the institution. The high school has not emerged in recent years as an institution distinctively suited to facilitate social equality. It has had to compete with other organizations for a role in the quest for social equality. The high school has had to share that role with junior colleges and colleges in the case of the more able students as well as with various government training and jobs programs in the case of the less able students. Moreover, school leaders have been unable or unwilling to mobilize the potential prestige associated with social equality to overcome the further dimunition of the already diminished exclusivity of the institution. In the transition from an institution based on mental discipline to one based on social efficiency the exclusive nature of the high school in general was overwhelmed by the vast numbers of youths enrolled across the nation. In the transition from an institution based on social efficiency to one based on social equality the still somewhat exclusive nature of many high schools, an exclusivity based on geography and the exclusivity of various residential areas, gave way to the full

scale integration that transcended geographic enclaves. This second major drop in the exclusivity of the high school is probably no less severe than the first.

In recent years the failure of the high school to emerge as a distinctive organization in the service of social equality seems to be accompanied by pressures for differentiation, shifts in the indicators used to assess its performance, and general changes in its operation. The introduction of magnet schools as a feature of many urban desegregation plans and recent proposals for voucher plans to allow the creation of different sorts of schools to serve different segments of the population are among the most prominent types of differentiation. Beyond such official proposals, we have witnessed the flight of students from the upper middle class to private schools, a development parallel to one that occurred in the 1920's (Krug, 1972, p. 125). Of course, there has been considerable differentiation within schools as administrators, teachers, and courses of study have become more diverse to deal with the increasingly diverse populations likely to be found in any single high school.[9]

The indicators used to assess the performance of schools have shifted during this same period. Once again they have become more specific and more proximal. Many states have introduced minimal competency tests for students, and some states plan to link performance on such tests to high school graduation. Other states are moving to introduce or tighten provisions for the testing of teachers. Social scientists have practically stumbled over each other while collecting specific data on student performance in segregated and integrated settings. With the prestige of the high school at a low point, all efforts at assessment have moved closer to the school and away from the less measurable

outcomes in the society at large.

High schools have also undergone rather rapid change in general during the last two decades. Many of these changes have centered around the loss of authority of the school and school officials. High schools now report high rates of absenteeism (Birman and Natriello, 1980) as well as high rates of violence and vandalism (National Institute of Education, 1978). In reaction to such phenomena high schools have been forced to give up relying solely on the authority of the institution and its leaders and adopt policies and practices associated with authority in the society at large. Thus many high schools now operate with the same due process provisions afforded by the American legal system and many high schools now employ security guards with functions parallel to those of the civil police.

The question that now confronts the American high school is whether it can find a new source of prestige, a new distinctive role in American society, that will permit the continuation of the comprehensive high school in the form we know it. The alternative seems to be a high school that is more differentiated, increasingly subjected to specific and proximal indicators of performance, and one with diminished authority.

Although our efforts have been exploratory and could profit from further research and analysis, our discussion of the history of the American high school suggests that the concepts we developed based on open system social models of organizations may be useful to historians of education. The use of such models may lead to some new perspectives on the growth and development of educational institutions in general. When used in conjunction with existing closed system models they may provide a richer and more satisfying explanation for major currents in the history of American education.

Notes

[1]The differential in responsiveness between public and private organizations may explain why private schools, despite dwindling enrollments in the sixties and early seventies were slow to respond in any way designed to increase support. This at the same time that public schools were engaged in all manner of innovation and experimentation in order to answer charges of mindlessness made by school critics of the sixties (e.g. Silberman, 1970). The greater susceptibility of public schools to demands from the environment may be the result of their role in serving a large segment of the environment. Private schools which are more exclusive and thus serve only a small segment of the environment, need only to maintain reasonably good connections with this smaller segment and so may be more resistant to general social forces. Changes in attitudes among the general public may thus affect private school organizations to a much lesser extent than would be the case for public school organizations.

[2]Standard treatments of the principalship in texts on educational administration (e.g. Gorton, 1980) divide the role into a number of relatively separate areas--community liaison, supervisor of teachers, building manager, cultivator of students--and thus tend to obscure the connections between these areas crucial to becoming an effective principal.

[3]Tyack and Hansot (1980) argue that educational leadership during the last century has shifted from a form of social movement to professional management. This shift seems to have resulted in school leaders who are less likely to have high stature in their local communities and thus from our perspective may have led to the dimunition of authority within school organizations.

[4]J. Meyer (1970) in his discussion of the charter of school organizations argues that the prestige of a given school may depend heavily on the future prospects of its graduates.

[5]The introduction of the standard unit or the Carnegie unit is an innovation that served to distinguish the high school (Krug, 1969, p. 161) both by separating it from the college and by making it more uniform. The use of the Carnegie unit resulted in a standardization of high school work as a requirement for college entry.

[6]Efforts by regional accrediting associations and the college board also served to make the high school more distinct from other institutions and more uniform in its organization.

[7]As late as 1940, however, educational leaders were concerned about the challenge to this role of the school in the quest for social efficiency presented by the Civilian Conservation Corp and the National Youth Association (Krug, 1972, p. 324).

[8]The major systematic inquiry into the performance of public high schools during this period, the 8 Year Study, focused on the effects of various high school curricula on student performance in college. It resulted, however, in garnering support for the less differentiated courses of study offered by progressive high schools (Krug, 1972, pp. 255-257). By and large though during the latter part of this period attention seems to have

been focused on the expansion of schools and school systems and the provision of educational services for ever greater numbers of students. This trend was extended into the sixties as school leaders worked to develop school facilities to handle the children of the post war baby boom.

[9]Mainstreaming is a movement which runs counter to this general course of events, and it is a direct product of the vision of the school as a vehicle for social equality.

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